

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1033

INFO AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

CINCPAC

DIA

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E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJ: OPPOSITION TO A DEMOCRAT GOVERNMENT

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

REF : BANGKOK 3052

SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH SENI PRAMOT IS PRIME MINISTER AND HIS DEMOCRAT-SOCIAL AGRARIAN GOVERNMENT HOLDS THE REINS OF POWER, THE OPPOSITION STILL HOPES TO DEHORSE THE DEMOCRATS. THE OPPOSITION, WHICH THE THAI NATION PARTY HEADS, WILL HAVE ITS FIRST OPPORTUNITY WHEN SENI PRESENTS HIS POLICY STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT, PROBABLY MARCH 3. UNTIL THEN, THE BEHIND THE SCENES MANEUVERING CONTINUED UNABATED. END SUMMARY

1. SENI PRAMOT IS THAILAND'S FIRST CIVILIAN PRIME MINISTER IN TWENTY YEARS. HIS DEMOCRAT-SOCIAL AGRARIAN COALITION GOVERNMENT IS IN THE PROCESS OF LEARNING THE ROPES AFTER IT CAME TO POWER FEBRUARY 21. THE COALITION, HOWEVER, CONFIDENTIAL

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SITS LOOSELY IN THE SADDLE AS IT MUST FOCUS ON CONFIRMING ITS

POLITICAL SUPREMACY, BEFORE IT CAN REALLY GET DOWN TO RUNNING THE COUNTRY. SENI POSTPONED FROM FEBRUARY 27 TO MARCH 3 THE FATEFUL VOTE OF CONFIDENCE WHICH ARTICLE 184 OF THE CONSTITUTION REQUIRES.

2. THE CABINET, PROBABLY DELIBERATELY, HAS TWO VACANCIES: THE DEPUTY MINISTERS OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND INDUSTRY. THE DEMOCRATS WILL PROBABLY USE THESE VACANCIES TO ENTICE ANOTHER PARTY INTO JOINING THE COALITION. THE PRIME TARGET OF SUCH ANGLING IS THE NEW FORCE PARTY.

3. SINCE SENI IS PRIME MINISTER, ANOTHER TRUMP CARD HE HOLDS IS HIS ABILITY TO DISSOLVE THE PARLIAMENT. SENI HAS DENIED OVER THE LAST WEEK THAT HE WOULD CALL FOR NEW ELECTIONS. HE PROBABLY HOPES SUCH STATEMENTS WILL DAMPEN FEARS IN CONSERVATIVE CORNERS. NEVERTHELESS THE CONSERVATIVES MAY SEE THE POSSIBILITY OF NEW ELECTIONS AS A RISK THEY MUST ACCEPT IN VOTING DOWN THE DEMOCRATS.

4. AS WE REPORTED EARLIER (BANGKOK 2860), THE CONSERVATIVE PARTIES ARE STILL WORKING ON OVERTURNING THE DEMOCRATS. COME MARCH 3K. CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE THAI NATION PARTY, TOLD THE DCM FEB 23 THAT THE CONSERVATIVES CAN BLOCK THE DEMOCRATS. CHATCHAI WENT ON TO SAY THAT SOCIAL ACTION PARTY LEADER KHUKRIT PRAMOT WILL THEN BECOME PRIME MINISTER. HE ARGUED THAT KHUKRIT WAS YOUNGER, MORE IN TOUCH WITH REALITY, AND ONLY HAD 18 VOTES.

5. CHATCHAI PROBABLY FEELS THAT WITH ONLY 18 VOTES KHUKRIT WOULD BE SUSCEPTIBLE TO PRESSURE FROM HIS CONSERVATIVE ALLIES. ALTHOUGH KHUKRIT'S SUPPORT IS KEY TO CONSERVATIVE SUCCESS, IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN JUST HOW BADLY KHUKRIT WANTS TO BE PRIME MINISTER (BANGKOK 3042).

6. GENERAL KRIT SIWARA REGULARLY CONTRIBUTED TO THE MANEUVERINGS OF BOTH THE DEMOCRATS AND THE CONSERVATIVES OVER THE PAST THREE WEEKS. SENI ACCEPTED KRIT'S CHOICE FOR THE POSITION OF DEFENSE MINISTER, GENERAL THAWIT SENIWONG NA AYUTTHAYA, INSTEAD OF THE EARLIER RUMORED GENERAL THANOM PATTHAMANON. SENI MAY FEEL THAT HE HAS MADE A PACT WITH KRIT WHICH WILL ENSURE THE SURVIVAL OF THE DEMOCRAT COALITION. KRIT, HOWEVER, CONFIDENTIAL

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MAY BE TINKERING IN BOTH CAMPS. KRIT HAS ANNOUNCED THAT HE WILL RESUME HIS SOUTHEAST ASIA TRAVELS, THIS TIME TO BURMA AND INDONESIA, ON THE DAY SENI HAS SCHEDULED THE VOTE OF CONFIDENCE.

7. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THE DEMOCRATS ARE NOW OFFICIALLY IN CHARGE OF THE ROYAL THAI GOVERNMENT, THEIR HOLD IS TENUOUS. IF THE DEMOCRATS MANAGE AN OPEN VOTE, THEY COULD GET OVER THE

MARCH 3 HURDLE. THE PARLIAMENTARY VOTES ARE SO DISTRIBUTED AMONG THE PARTIES, HOWEVER, THAT THE VOTE SHOULD BE CLOSE. THE DEMOCRATS HAVE SOME ADVANTAGE IN THAT ABSTENTIONS ARE IN THEIR FAVOR BECAUSE ARTICLE 184 DOES NOT REQUIRE A PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY, ONLY "ONE-HALF OF THE MEMBERS WHO ARE PRESENT AT THE SITTING."

KINTNER

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